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PROGRAM	Crossfire	STATION	CNN-TV Cable News Network
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SUBJECT	Interview with Vladimir Posner		

ANNOUNCER: Live from Washington, "Crossfire."

On the left, Tom Braden. On the right, Robert Novak. In the crossfire, from San Francisco, Soviet commentator Vladimir Posner.

TOM BRADEN: Good evening. Welcome to "Crossfire."

When our guest tonight appeared on American television recently as a critic of one of President Reagan's speeches, the White House shook with anger. Pat Buchanan complained, and the President was said to have complained, and ABC, the network on which our guest appeared, issued an apology -- sort of.

Congress shook with anger, too. Robert K. Dornan of California, who sometimes co-hosts "Crossfire," took the floor to call our guest a "betraying little Jew." He later issued an apology -- sort of.

Now comes the calm after the storm, and we'd like to ask this man who spent his boyhood in the United States some serious questions.

President Reagan has said he will no longer abide by our arms control agreement. What will the Russians do?

The President has said he hopes for a summit meeting this summer. What will the Russians do?

President Reagan has said that the Soviet Union has been cheating. What do the Russians say?

Our guest is a New York Yankee fan, but don't be fooled by that.

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He gets paid for saying what the Soviet Union wants him to say.

Bob?

J ROBERT NOVAK: Mr. Posner, before we get to the serious questions, Tom neglected to say that when you were a commentator on ABC falling the President's speech you called him a liar. Now I wonder, Mr. Posner, the next time Chairman Gorbachev has a speech to the [sic] Soviet Union if I might have the opportunity to go on Soviet television and make a little commentary on what I think of his speech?

VLADIMIR POSNER: Well, Mr. Novak, if you're going to recall what I said I would appreciate your being, you know, very correct. I said that some of the things in the speech were distortions. I did not call him a liar, number one.

Number two, I hope you understand that I was invited by ABC. I did not bull my way into the studio, as it were, and grab the mike from someone.

And, number three, we have had American journalists on Soviet television. For instance, my colleague, the New York Times Bureau Chief in Moscow, who, incidentally, speaks very good Russian. I would say it would be a good thing to have Americans on television to give the U.S. point of view. I don't think you're particularly interested in Vladimir Posner's point of view. You're interested in knowing what the Soviet point of view is, and that's what I try to tell.

NOVAK: Well, don't you think it would be a good idea, then? Maybe you could recommend it to your superiors, sir, the next time you're back home to have, not necessarily me. I was being half frivolous. I don't speak Russians. But perhaps you could find a Russian-speaking American who has an independent point of view who could give an American point of view. Wouldn't that be a good idea -- commenting on the spot about Mr. Gorbachev and telling the Soviet people that the Soviet leader is wrong? Do you think your superiors would go along with that, sir?

POSNER: What I am thinking is it would be a good idea to have more Americans presenting the American viewpoint. Now, independent, non-dependent, these words don't really mean much in this context. We would be interested to know the American official viewpoint on American policies, if indeed we're talking about that, and I believe we will have more of them.

NOVAK: I take that, sir, to -- as a no, that you don't think it would be a good idea for an American journalist to go on the air without any censorship, without any pre-arranged text, just as you did, on -- in regard to President Reagan -- and make a commentary on what he thought of the remarks of Chairman Gorbachev.

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POSNER: I wonder if you're hearing me. Maybe my English isn't quite good enough. I said I thought it would be a good idea to have Americans giving the American viewpoint when there are speeches that concern Soviet-American relations.

I said that clearly enough.

BRADEN: All right. Ok, I think that is clear enough.

Now, Mr. Posner....

POSNER: Thank you.

BRADEN: Both President Reagan and British Prime Minister Thatcher have called Soviet attention to alleged violations of the Salt Treaties, and they say the Soviet Union has been cheating.

Now, Mr. Shultz says that there is time for the Soviets to alter their situation. He said that in respect to our -- to the President's statement that we would pull out of the Salt Agreement. Why don't -- why don't you address this matter? I mean, why doesn't -- why don't you as a commentator or Chairman Gorbachev address this matter? The United States is worried about alleged Soviet violations.

POSNER: Mr. Braden, I believe that the Soviet Union has addressed this matter many times. You have accused us of cheating. We have accused you of cheating. And these are well-documented, I suppose, on both sides. And I'd like to make it quite clear that I am not an absolute expert on these matters.

What I will say, though, is that the American decision -- the Reagan decision to pull out of Salt II seems to have caused a lot of concern with the people you've just mentioned, including Margaret Thatcher. I believe that the Europeans are somewhat concerned about this. I cannot -- and I don't think it would be wise for me at this point to try to get into the technicalities of Salt II which for most people -- they're simply not aware of. They've not been published a whole lot, and nobody's really gone into them except experts. But I do not think this business of hurling invectives at each other and saying, "You cheated, you cheated," and to use that as a rationale for pulling out of something that has controlled the arms race, at least to a certain extent, is a dangerous thing to do.

BRADEN: All right, Mr. Posner, let me tell you about that, that, first of all, I agree with you.

POSNER: I'm sure.

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BRADEN: I agree with you thoroughly that it is a dangerous thing for us to pull out of the Salt II Treaty because I believe that it sets certain boundaries and I'm happy to have the boundaries.

But, why don't -- I repeat my question. Why don't you take up each violation of which we have accused you and discuss it, point out where we're wrong, if we are wrong?

POSNER: That's a very good question, and I wish I could refer you to the articles that have appeared in the Pravda, in Izvestia in which there have been details, step-by-step, the accusation, the reality, by people who really know the business.

I don't know if we've been translated into English. I don't know if they've been brought to your attention. But we have done that.

Now, how much time or attention this has been given in the United States is something I simply cannot comment on.

NOVAK: Just let me follow up on that, Mr. Posner.

POSNER: Sure.

NOVAK: Is Mr. Gorbachev getting ready to pull out of the summit, you think?

POSNER: Pull out of the summit is something like -- I think the wording is somewhat unfortunate. I would say that we want a summit enormously, that a summit is absolutely necessary, and Geneva was hailed in my country as a step forward. Finally, the two leaders are talking to each other.

NOVAK: So you're not....

POSNER: I'm sorry?

NOVAK: So you're not getting ready to pull out of the summit, then?

POSNER: We talked about the spirit of Geneva. Today, that spirit seems to lack even -- anybody at all [sic]. We want it, but we want to see some concrete results.

NOVAK: Let me try another subject.

POSNER: All right, my answer, if you want it clearly, we are not trying to pull out of the summit.

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NOVAK: Mr. Posner, you do consider yourself a journalist, I take it, and I wonder, sir, if -- as a journalist you have some kind of feeling that the Soviets media, the Soviet news media, has nothing whatsoever about the tremendous war of oppression that your government is conducting in Afghanistan. There's no reporting on it. There is no details on the -- on the tremendous loss of life. Does that bother you as a journalist somewhat?

POSNER: As a journalist, as someone who lives in the Soviet Union, allow me to contradict you.

There is -- there are reports about what's happening in Afghanistan on Soviet television, at prime time, in newspaper. We know and we regret the people who are dying there, both our own and Afghanis. We are well-aware of it. Do not, please, tell me that we don't have -- that we have no reports on that. It is simply not true. We do have reports.

NOVAK: Well, Mr. Posner, you know, you don't run a casualty list. You don't run reaction. There is nothing comparable on Soviet television to what the United States did when we were fighting in -- in Vietnam, which I think was a just cause, unlike your cause. But I -- I -- don't you as a journalist sometimes wish that you could go there and report of your fellow Soviet countrymen in combat against the Afghan people?

POSNER: First of all, I don't consider them to be in combat against the Afghan people. I would appreciate it if you wouldn't put words....

BRADEN: But the answer is....

POSNER: Number two, I would certainly like to go to Afghanistan. I am not the only one who'd like to go there. We have people there. But, I would like to caution you on one thing.

I think it's wrong for you to look at us and say, "Why don't you do things the way we do?" And I think it would be wrong for us to say to you, "Why don't you do things the way we do?"

I think we're both legitimate.

NOVAK: How are you legitimate, sir, when we have a free press and you have no free press? You have nobody in -- in the news media in the Soviet Union who doesn't work for the government.

POSNER: It just so happens that while our press is controlled by the government, by the Party, and your press is controlled by the companies, by the corporations.

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BRADEN: Wait a minute, Mr. Posner.

[Confusion of voices].

BRADEN: Now look, your father -- your father, to get personal -- he worked for the movies.

POSNER: Yes.

BRADEN: And he was blacklisted, which we regard it today as an abhorration of our freedom. He was blacklisted because of his thoughts, not because of anything he did, but because he did -- because of his thoughts, and you are his son, and yet you uphold a society and praise it in which Elana Bonner is exiled because of her thoughts.

POSNER: What are you asking me?

BRADEN: Well, I'm asking you how you can -- how you can praise and uphold a society in which actually the legal process results in Elana Bonner being convicted of disparaging the Soviet Union, convicted and sentenced to exile?

POSNER: I'm not -- if I'm not mistaken, Elana Bonner was in the United States. Is that correct?

BRADEN: That's right.

POSNER: Did she not go back to the Soviet Union?

BRADEN: No. She will go back to the Soviet Union.

POSNER: Ok, she has not been exiled.

BRADEN: I'm asking you about why she was exiled to Gorky.

POSNER: Excuse me. She does not have to live in Gorky. She chose to live in Gorky with her husband. So what I think you're really asking me is why is Andrei Sakharov in Gorky?

BRADEN: No, I am asking you about Mrs. Bonner. Mrs. Bonner was convicted -- convicted....

POSNER: She does not have to live with her husband in Gorky.

BRADEN: But, she was convicted in the Soviet courts. She was convicted in a Soviet court of disparaging her country.

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POSNER: She was convicted in a court of law of anti-Soviet activities. Now these laws exist in my country. You can respect them or not respect them. But if you're going to live there, you have to respect those laws.

BRADEN: I'm telling you that's not -- that very laws shows that you are not a free society.

POSNER: I will tell you that we are a different society from yours, and I would certainly not argue that they're the same.

What I'm saying is you must believe me that 277 million Soviet citizens living in my country -- the overwhelming majority support those laws and support their system.

[Confusion of voices].

NOVAK: Tom, we have to take a break.

BRADEN: They can't say anything if they don't support the laws.

NOVAK: All right, we'll be back to talk to Mr. Posner about Mr. Sakharov, about freedom in the Soviet Union, and indeed about the life of Vladimir Posner as a Soviet journalist.

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BRADEN: We're talking with Vladimir Posner -- welcome back to "Crossfirer" -- who is a Soviet journalist -- we bet Soviet agent -- made famous, of all things, by American television.

Mr. Posner, we were discussing, when took the break, Mrs. Bonner and Soviet thought.

Now, I just want to make it -- I would just like to get you to admit this, that the difference between our country and yours is that people can go to jail or be exiled in the Soviet Union for the crime of criticizing the state. That is not true in our country.

POSNER: I'd like to make it a little bit clearer.

People can go to jail in my country for anti-Soviet activity aimed at subverting the state or subverting the system, and I believe that in your country that if you try to subvert the system itself, not criticize simply, but subvert the system, anti-Americanism, you're not going to get away with it.

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BRADEN: No, there is no such thing. Now look, Mr. Novak here -- Mr. Novak here is a well-known journalist, and he was anti-American in the Soviet definition of that word -- he was anti-American because he constantly criticized Jimmy Carter who was President of the United States.

I am a journalist in the United States, and I constantly criticize Ronald Reagan, who is President of the United States.

You can't do that.

POSNER: I can't do what?

BRADEN: Criticize -- you can't hold Premier Gorbachev up to ridicule. You can't say that he is a clown.

POSNER: You know, quite frankly -- quite frankly I am not sure that saying that a President of a country is a clown is the greatest, let us say, part of democracy. I'm not so sure that's what it's all about.

BRADEN: I would use various words. Mr. Novak used various words about Jimmy Carter.

POSNER: Right.

BRADEN: But in the short hand of this broadcast, I want to get you to admit an important thing -- you can't criticize your own leaders and we can.

POSNER: I would like to make it quite clear that we have a different criticism than you. It is true that in our society if you're going to fight the society it will punish you. There is no doubt about it. I am absolutely acknowledging it. It is not a question of criticizing Mr. A, B or C. It is a question of going against the society itself as Madam Bonner has done.

BRADEN: Just how can you change? Your society can't change because it can't be criticized.

POSNER: You cannot -- and I agree with this -- you cannot criticize the very fabric of the society itself, and I think one of the reasons for this...

[Confusion of voices].

POSNER: Would you allow me to explain if you want to hear this?



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The nation is that we have sacrificed so many people, so many lives, and we're still very young -- we're 68 years-old -- that the majority of the people do not want to hear of this.

BRADEN: So have we. So have we, Mr. Posner.

NOVAK: Mr. Posner?

BRADEN: We've lost just as many people over the history -- over the years of history as you have. And we criticize our state, and we criticize our leaders, and that's what makes us move and change and be better than we were.

POSNER: Mr. Braden, if that's what you want to have, more power to you. But allow us...

NOVAK: Mr. Posner?

POSNER: ...to have what we want to have. Allow us that. Allow us to have what we support, and you have what you support. Let us at least regard each other with a bit of respect.

I'm not saying you should change. Why do you tell me we should change?

NOVAK: Mr. Posner, let me just try to tidy up a little of the factual things here.

POSNER: Yes.

NOVAK: We're not talking about criticizing the fabric of society. You are forbidden to criticize. You cannot get up in the morning and say the Minister of Planning, the Minister of Foreign Affairs is doing something wrong. You can't sit down at a typewriter like I can and write that Secretary of State George Shultz is making a mess of the Middle East policy.

I'm not criticizing any fabric. I'm criticizing the fact that you can't do that without authorization from your government. Isn't that true?

POSNER: I, as a journalist, have to be responsible, and I will agree with you that I cannot do that. Ok?

But, on the other hand, let me say that I think there's very good sense to that, and I'm saying allow us to be the way we are and allow you to be the way you are.

NOVAK: But I just want to....

POSNER: Do not demand we be the same.

BRADEN: All right, let me ask you....

NOVAK: Wait a minute, Tom.

I just want to tidy up one other thing. You said that the difference between American journalists and Soviet journalists is that you take the orders from the state and we take the orders from the corporation.

Let me just tell you something, Mr. Posner. You know it, but I'm not going to let that pass. Nobody gives me any orders. They haven't in the nearly 35 years that I have been a professional journalist. I just wanted to tell you that.

POSNER: And I recant for you that I have not been given orders either. But, you can be fired just as well as I can.

NOVAK: I'll tell you, I've got so many employers that it would be very hard to fire me. But let me....

BRADEN: You must understand that -- you must understand the American system better than that, and I know it -- it's ridiculous to say that newspaper men in the Soviet Union -- that newspaper men in the United States are victims of corporate policy.

POSNER: I didn't say that. I didn't say that.

BRADEN: Or that they're even -- or even that they're told what to say by anybody.

POSNER: I did not say that.

BRADEN: Now, look, I ask you as a Soviet journalist -- let me ask you as a Soviet journalist.

POSNER: Sure.

BRADEN: How do you -- how do you say, "I am a Soviet journalist" and excuse yourself when you didn't tell the world -- the world, one globe -- you didn't tell the world for two whole days about the most serious nuclear accident of our time?

POSNER: Mr. Braden, I'm really surprised that you ask this question that I've answered about a billion times and you know the answer. And the main thing is that this answer was given at a press conference in Moscow by the man who headed the committee that examined what had happened.

Basically, such information was not reported by the people in the Ukraine, the bureaucracy which held it up. And when it did report, it gave a report that did not correspond to the fact.

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When people went down there, I think they got a lot of....

BRADEN: Can you imagine such a thing happening.

[Confusion of voices].

BRADEN: Can you imagine such a thing happening in the United States? Can you imagine that we would have a serious nuclear accident and the bureaucracy, say in Tuscaloosa, Iowa, wouldn't report it?

POSNER: I can imagine things not being reported. And if you want me to remind you of things that were not disasters in the nuclear sense, but let us say hoaxes perpetrated on the American people by the government and thus not reported by the press, I can give you a few examples, like who mined the Nicaraguan ports, things like that.

BRADEN: That was reported in the press.

POSNER: So please don't tell me these things....

BRADEN: That was reported in -- that was reported in the press, and let me tell you when we had a nuclear accident the tv cameras were there before the government was.

NOVAK: Mr. Posner?

POSNER: Yes, please, go ahead.

NOVAK: Mr. Posner, you are traveling the country. I understand we're having another one of the Citizens' Summits. Isn't it very peculiar that at the last Citizens' Summit in 1984 the Americans criticized their government? They had all kinds of different ranges of opinions while the Soviets citizens were automatons. They all had the same opinion and not one had a single harsh word to say about its government.

POSNER: Mr. Novak, get your facts right. The last Citizens' Summit was in 1986, not '84, number one.

NOVAK: '86?

POSNER: It was shown on national channel 1 all over the Soviet Union and 150 million people heard American criticizing the Soviet government and the Soviet people for Afghanistan, for Jewish immigration.

NOVAK: That wasn't my question.

POSNER: It was all over. I would like to ask you why wasn't it

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shown nationally in the United States?

BRADEN: All right, Mr. Posner, I can't -- I can't allow Mr. Novak time to answer that question because whether in the Soviet Union or the United States of America, we're out of time.

We want to thank you for being our guest on "Crossfire," Mr. Posner.

Bob and I'll be back in just a minute.

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NOVAK: Tom, to say that the Soviet Union lets an independent American journalist like me, even like you, on Soviet television to comment without censorship on Gorbachev's speech, that's the day I'll stand on my head on national television.

BRADEN: All right, you can try it.

I would say that Mr. Posner was insulting and demeaning and disparaging rather like you.

NOVAK: [Laughs].

BRADEN: I'm Tom Braden. Goodnight for "Crossfire."

NOVAK: Gee, I almost liked you tonight.

I'm Robert Novak, on the right. Join us again next time for another edition of "Crossfire."